

# The Valley Scribe



Newsletter of the San Fernando Valley Branch  
of the California Writers Club



## HOW TO INCORPORATE MYSTERY, THRILLER, SUSPENSE, ROMANCE AND ACTION INTO ANY WORK

By CWC-SFV Speaker Chair Heather Bradshaw



**Clay Stafford**

The San Fernando Valley Branch of the California Writers Club is pleased to welcome CLAY STAFFORD, as the keynote speaker on Saturday, October 5 at 1:00 pm with a Zoom presentation about incorporating all the best story elements into your work.

As Clay explains it, the pentology of an exceptional story incorporates mystery, thriller, suspense, action, and romance. One will be your focus; four will be your nuances. A successful story holds all five elements because all five engage the reader's emotions. In this interactive discussion, Clay will address how to incorporate all five into your story to create a manuscript that an agent, and ultimately a reader, cannot put down.

Clay Stafford is an American bestselling and award-winning author, poet, screenwriter, and playwright; film and television producer, director, showrunner, actor; book, film, and stage reviewer as well as public speaker. He has sold nearly four million copies of his books and has had his work distributed in sixteen languages. He is founder and CEO of the annual Killer Nashville International Writers Conference and a contributor to *Writer's Digest* magazine with his online column, "Killer Writer".

To learn more about this presenter visit, [www.claystafford.com](http://www.claystafford.com) We look forward to seeing you at our October meeting!

**In-person Attendees:** Mingle with other writers and see this presenter on the big screen in the Saban Center at the Motion Picture Television Fund, 23388 Mulholland Drive, Woodland Hills, CA 91364. In-person attendees do not need to register in advance. Members free. Guests pay \$10 at the door. First visit free. Please arrive a few minutes early.

**Zoom Attendees:** All members of the CWC-SFV will receive a Zoom invitation to this presentation. Members of other CWC branches should contact Zoom host, Anat Wenick, by noon on October 4 at [SFV.CWC@gmail.com](mailto:SFV.CWC@gmail.com) for an invitation to register. Zoom guests may purchase admission at [www.cwc-sfv.org](http://www.cwc-sfv.org) by noon on October 4. After purchasing admission, guests will receive a Zoom invitation. We regret we cannot accommodate late requests.

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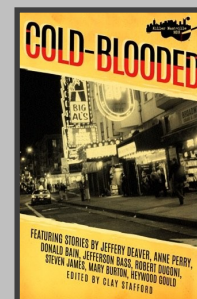
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### Clay Stafford's Popular Publication: *Killer Nashville Noir: Cold-Blooded*

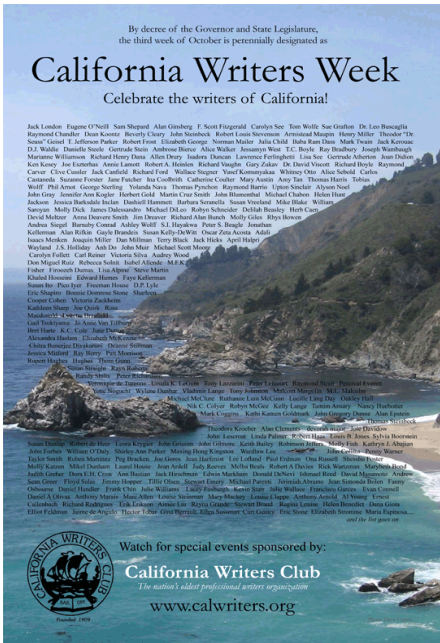
This collection features work by some of the biggest names in suspense, Stories by Donald Bain, Robert Dugoni, Jefferson Bass, Mary Burton, Jonathan Stone, Steven James, Maggie Toussaint, Clay Stafford, Heywood Gould, Jaden Terrell, and more are featured in this collection.

Every year some of the best selling authors in the thriller world converge in Tennessee for the *Killer Nashville* conference, an event where popular authors meet and mingle with their fans, where new authors pick up tricks of the trade, and where best-selling current writers enjoy sharing the latest thriller trade news.

[About — Clay Stafford](#)



# IN 2003, THE CWC MADE HISTORY: THE CALIFORNIA WRITERS WEEK RESOLUTION WAS PASSED BY OUR STATE LEGISLATURE!



For several months in early 2003, with the expert help of Anthony Folcarelli, the Central Board of the California Writers Club worked to establish California Writers Week. The plan was successful and on September 4, 2003 at 10 a.m., California Writers Club members gathered on the Assembly floor in Sacramento to receive a Joint Legislative Resolution from Assemblyman Tim Leslie. The new Resolution was endorsed by the California Library Association. We invite all authors and readers to celebrate with us. To learn more of the history of California Writers Week go to:

[The Story behind California Writers Week](#)  
[Text of the Resolution](#)



**F**ormer CWC President Barbara Truax (holding resolution) with Assemblyman Tim Leslie and Anne Marie Gold, member of the executive board of the California Library Association and head of the Sacramento Library. Below: Everyone who actively supported California Writers Week Resolution. Their names can be viewed at: [History | California Writers Club \(calwriters.org\)](#)



CWC Cofounder  
Jack London



Cofounder Poet laureate  
Ina Coolbrith

California Writers Club members witnessed this important moment in California Writers Club history. Left to right: Dianne Levy, Marin branch president and CWC webmaster; Dave Sawle, Berkeley branch representative; Carol McConkie, Redwood branch president; Jeremiah O'Brien, Marin branch representative; Bill Baldwin, South Bay branch president and Central Board representative, CB Secretary; Amy Peele, Marin branch; Anthony Folcarelli, Sacramento branch and Special Consultant to the Central Board; Tom Adams, Sacramento branch representative and CB Vice President, Jackie Krug, Sacramento branch; Marilyn Smith Murphy, Sacramento branch. Front: Teresa LeYung Ryan, Peninsula branch; Beth Tigner, Sacramento branch; Shirley Adams, Sacramento branch; Barbara; Octavia Simien, Sacramento branch president.



# THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY BRANCH OF THE CALIFORNIA WRITERS CLUB



## PRESENTS OUR 2024-25 GUEST SPEAKERS



Whether you're a published author or "have always wanted to write," please join the CWC-SFV for monthly meetings at the Motion Picture and Television Fund Wasserman Campus at 23388 Mulholland Drive, Woodland Hills, CA 91364. Meetings begin at 1 pm. All meetings are hybrid—available online, so you can join from anywhere. Presenters will join us either in person or via Zoom on the huge screen in The Saban Center for Health and Wellness. You'll enjoy networking with other writers while learning more about the craft and business of writing. Programs are free for all CWC members. Contact us at [cwc-sfv.org](http://cwc-sfv.org). For guest admission, visit [cwc-sfv.org](http://cwc-sfv.org).

*CWC-SFV Program Chair Heather Bradshaw*

September 7, 2024



Holly Watson

Book Publicity: The Basics and Beyond

<https://www.hollywatsonpr.com/>

February 1, 2025



Lisa Teasley

The Art of the Short Story

<https://www.lisateasley.com/>

October 5, 2024



CLAY STAFFORD

Incorporate Mystery, Thriller, Suspense, Romance and Action into Any Work <https://claystafford.com/>

March 1, 2025



MANDY JACKSON-BEVERLY

Self Publishing and the Independent Bookstore

<https://mandyjacksonbeverly.com/>

(In-Person)

November 2, 2024



LEE BARNATHAN

All About Ghost Writing

<https://leebarathan.com/>

April 5, 2025



MARCIE RENDON

Native American Poetry-Song Writing

<https://www.marcierendon.com/home>

(Zoom)

December 7, 2024



SHAWNA KENNEY

How to Write a Winning Book Hook, Query an Agent, and Find Your Place in the Publishing World

<https://www.shawnakenney.com/>

May 3, 2025



MATTHEW FELIX

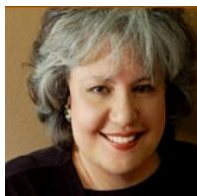
A Nontraditional Path to Self-Publishing

<https://www.matthewfelix.com/>

(Zoom)

(Zoom)

January 11, 2025



DARA MARKS

Story Development

June 7, 2025



THOM HARP

Writing A Low Budget Feature and Getting It Made

[www.thomharp.com](http://www.thomharp.com)

(In-Person)

# CWC-SFV FOUNDING MEMBER, FORMERLY CARLA LAUREN HENRY, RETURNS!

By Carla Lauren Bollinger



**I**n 1986, Yolanda Fintor and I met in a Pierce College Extension creative writing class that was taught by California State Northridge professor, Joan Jones. In her class, Yolanda and I learned about a new writers club: the California Writers Club which had begun to hold meetings in the San Fernando Valley. Joan encouraged us to join the new group and we two friends leapt into becoming Founding Members and serving on the first CWC-SFV board. Some members on this new club started a writers critique group and Yolanda and I quickly joined them. In one of our monthly sessions, only

Yolanda and I met at my house while pea soup simmered in my kitchen.

We two began brainstorming about our recipes, and decided to write a co-authored cookbook, which we eventually titled: [Souper Skinny Soups](#). We co-authors enjoyed our visits to several book stores to promote our first cook book—a couple of years later our individual cookbooks. Almost every weekend, for eight years, we co-authors visited numerous bookstore throughout southern California and Nevada.



From the late Eighties to the early Nineties. Carla Bollinger and Yolanda Fintor marketed their cook books in California and Nevada Bookstores.

Even though I loved CWC-SFV and writing articles, in 1989 I joined another Pierce college poetry class. Eventually, I won the Pierce College Literature Award for their *Direction* journal which published three of my poems. Even though I had experienced success as an author of travel, business and other articles, poetry became my greatest love. Paradigm Poet meetings as well as my Saturday painting classes, conflicted with the CWC-SFV Saturday meetings.



“A 2004 Paradigm Poets gathering: the late CWC-SFV member, Nan Hunt, is at the front-right. I’m wedged between Chris Beauvais and Shirley Windward on the left side. Virginia Hutchins-Butherus (also a CWC-SFV member) is wearing a red outfit behind Nan Hunt.”  
Carla L. Bollinger

My poems have appeared in a number of literary journals and my art started selling sporadically to corporations and individuals. I also became a member of the Westlake Village Art Guild. The Paradigm Poets have disintegrated, many members have left this planet, but a few years ago I joyfully discovered the Poetry Nights Open Mic readings at the Thousand Oaks Library. In the summer of 2023, I was a featured poet.

Currently, I’m preparing my poetry journal for publication, but I have a severe case of Adult ADHD and get easily sidetracked! While still working full-time in the advertising specialty world, I’m also a devoted grandmother who’s involved with many happenings. Another great writing love: writing articles for the non-profit, *Los Angeles Corral of the Westerners*, an organization devoted to the Western history and lore. And as an

environmentalist, I handle being the editor of newsletters and newsletter articles, and other projects. I also serve as a board member of the *Simi Hills Wildlife Organization*. My latest writing project: published on August 8, 2024, in the *LA Times Editorial Guest Columnist* this article, “Field Lab – separating fact from fiction.”

The ink never dries and the sun never sets in my world!

# Song of Daybreak

By Carla Lauren Bollinger

Coyote crossing Woolsey Canyon –  
His golden eyes stare at me as I freeze,  
brake, stare back. Flash.  
He lunges across the blacktop  
A whorl of gray flank breaks through  
brambly bushes across the road.  
He disappears in the understory  
of sage, deerweed, and buckwheat.  
Into the open space, unrestrained,  
hunter, predator, killer, scavenger.  
He lives in the moment, a clarity of  
needs traversing humankind's  
jumble-jam erector set structures.  
I linger there on the road, a split-fracture  
pause as I video slide the pathos—  
Columbine, Sandy Hook, Aurora, Parkland.  
A weariness of freak justifications  
rabid devotees in sanctimonious song:  
“God Bless America” screaming  
2nd Amendment patriotism while  
humans freeze frame horror shows  
Again, again, again wretchedness reigns.  
Who cannot say this world isn't cruel –  
Ask the mouse in coyote's mouth.  
Humans, animals, we're all crawling  
through the dirt and rocks laid down.  
My foot lifts off the brake, I press down,  
accelerate full speed blasting  
into the urban quagmire of humans.  
The coyote watches. He is always hungry.

Daybreak Woolsey Canyon



Painting by Carla Lauren Bollinger



PAULA DIGGS

The September issue of *The Valley Scribe* highlighted the work of two artists and two of SFV writers—Karen Gorback and Jim Wolff—who were published in [Vision and Verse; A Fusion of Art and Photography](#). But the work of one more SFV member was also in the “ekphrastic publication of vision and verse”: talented artist and published writer, Paula Diggs. Her sketch of a spooky old house, featured in her book, [Mysteries and Deserted Mansions](#).

*Paula Diggs is a writer and artist who lives in Southern California. She writes mystery books for early readers age 7-12. Paula has won prizes for her art work and writing. She loves nature and kids as well as her two dogs and family. Paula appreciates her support from CWC.*

When I saw Paula’s drawing, I made an editorial decision to hold back the drawing, Why? I coveted her spooky old house for the October *Scribe*! And I also wanted an opportunity to feature the work of a long-time CWC-SFV member. Paula is a successful artist who recently exhibited her drawings and at the Calabasas swimming and tennis center. I’ve also discovered that she illustrated a book, [Do Not Break the Circle](#), by another CWC-SFV member, Lillian Rodich.

Below is the Spooky Old House: a perfect Halloween image!

Thanks, Paula Diggs.

Kathy Highcove, *The Valley Scribe* Editor

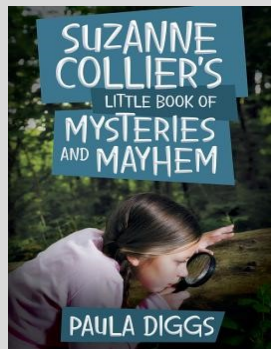


VISION & VERSE  
A Fusion of Poetry, Prose, Art and Photography  
EDITOR LES BERNSTEIN

Paula Diggs has written three books for early readers age 7-12: [Suzanne Collier’s Little Book of Mystery and Mayhem](#), [Suzanne Collier’s Second Book of Mystery and Mayhem](#) and [Amazon.com: Mysteries of the Deserted Mansion](#).

They are available on Amazon and Barnes and Noble online. Adults like them too. Read the second and discover why Suzanne doesn’t like her new home.

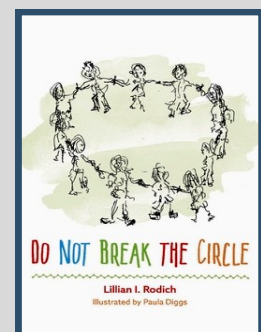
Source: Amazon Books



A SPOOKY OLD HOUSE

*DO NOT BREAK THE CIRCLE* brings to life a powerful collection of voices through poetry and illustration that are intended to confront the effects of bullying on primary age children

Source: Amazon books.



# Pascal and Julien Review – Searching for a New Dad

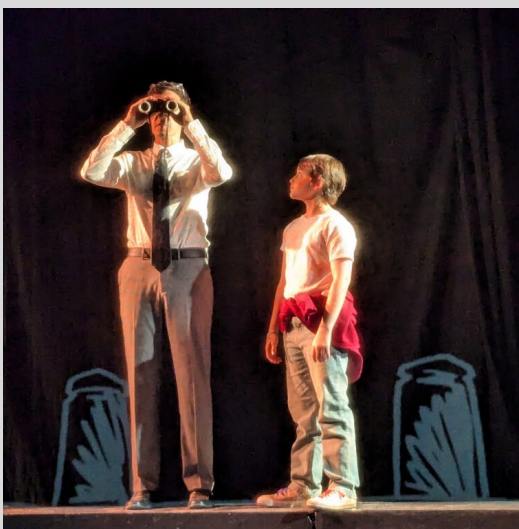
By CWC-SFV Member Dr. Elaine L. Mura



Darby Winn and Paul Turbiak – Photo by Jay McAdams



Darby Winn and Paul Turbiak after the show –  
Photo by Elaine L. Mura



Paul Turbiak and Darby Winn – Photo by Jennie McInnes

A charming and uniquely touching story about fathers and sons makes its U.S. premiere at the 24<sup>th</sup> Street Theatre in 2024. Penned by Australian playwright Daniel Keene, PASCAL AND JULIEN debuted in Paris, where it was titled “L’Apprentice.” For obvious reasons – and especially in an election year – the name ran into a problem crossing the Atlantic. Author Keene graciously renamed his play PASCAL AND JULIEN and arranged for an English translation by Severine Magois in order to make it accessible to Americans. Of course, it should be noted that the lines have also been translated into Spanish (in superscript above the stage action) for the edification and enjoyment of 24<sup>th</sup> Street Theatre Spanish-speaking patrons! As always, the 24<sup>th</sup> Street Theatre remains a community-based arts project which sees its role as a community center for the neighborhood, a hub always ready to lend a helping hand to neighbors and friends (even going so far as to feed a pack of feral cats at the request of a local resident).

The time is now; and the place is Paris, France. Julien (Darby Winn alternating with Jude Schwartz) is 12 years old and on a quest to find a father. Of course, the obvious question is why. It seems that Julien’s dad is distant, remote, and pretty uninvolved with his son. From his candidate pool (developed with the use of binoculars from the apartment he shares with his biological father), Julien has narrowed his search to Pascal (Paul Turbiak), an isolated, awkward adult who spends his days alone huddled over a cup of coffee and a crossword puzzle in a local cafe. Perhaps something will be stirred in Pascal’s reluctant heart by this clever youngster who’s really looking for someone to share with – a friend. To quote director Debbie Devine, “Because this kid has the crazy idea that Pascal would make a better father than his own, it completely changes the man...children feel the whimsy; they see the possibility. To a kid, nothing is impossible.”

Poignantly helmed by Debbie Devine, who clearly “gets it,” PASCAL AND JULIEN becomes more than the sum of its parts. In only 45 minutes, the play tells a far bigger story than is obvious from its relatively simplistic premise. Without becoming maudlin or overly saccharine, PASCAL AND JULIEN tells its tale with minimalist speed, simplicity, and honesty. It is no small wonder that the tiny French play was awarded the Prix Theatre en Pages in France. The cast also excels in this two hander as the isolated and socially inept Pascal discovers parts of himself that he has chosen to ignore for years, as pre-teen Julien begins to grow in maturity and understanding, and as both are changed forever through their mutual interactions.

The creative team also deserve kudos, including composer Bradley Brough, scenic designer Keith Mitchell, video designer Matthew G. Hill, lighting designer Dan Weingarten, sound designer John Nobori, costume designer Shannon Kennedy, and Spanish translation by Jesus Castanos-Chima (who also assistant directs).

PASCAL AND JULIEN painlessly and with good humor delves into some pretty heavy stuff. It will definitely appeal to audiences who enjoy the “je ne sais quoi” of French productions, those who enjoy a well-written and acted show, and individuals who enjoy issues of family, friendship, and personal change. To keep the French theme going, the producers even offered French crepes topped with fresh fruit to the audience after the show.

PASCAL AND Julien runs through October 27, 2024, with performances at 3 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. on Saturdays, at 3 p.m. on Sundays, and at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, 9/16/24. The 24<sup>th</sup> Street Theatre is located at 1117 West 24<sup>th</sup> Street, Los Angeles, CA 90007 – 1725. Tickets are \$24 for adults; \$10 for kids under 18; seniors, students and teachers \$15; North University Park residents \$2.40; and Monday night Pay-What-You-Can. For information and reservations, call 213-745-6516 or go [online](#).

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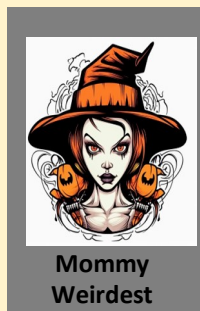
## Capping it Off

By CWC-SFV Member  
Michael Edelstein

It's October near Halloween  
What's the hat you're wearing mean?  
Are the things it's saying true  
Just how much is your hat you  
Does it simply go along  
Or does it truly sing your song?  
Some hats that are made of wool  
Are too simple much like a fool  
Some chapeaus made of cotton  
Adorn personalities very rotten  
A few caps made of shiny silk  
Are worn by those of a finer ilk  
There are many who wear a *kipa*  
Some are shallow, but lots deeper  
This is a query of fine designs  
How much of you your hat defines  
You don't have to read between the lines  
Nor will have to pay large fines  
Just know that your topping's designs  
With your temperament aligns

Picture by Julie Newsome-Edelstein





## What's A Girl To Do?

Looking in the looking glass

Like Alice in Wonderland

Where is the good witch

With the bright smiling face

Ah but that was many moons ago

She flew away on her magic broom

The moon is more grey tonight

The good witch has lost her glow

She looks in the looking glass

Behold an older woman appears

A transformation has taken place

She has become her mother

What's a girl to do

Relax and watch the soaps on TV

Stay in your pajamas all day it's okay

There's no reason for an excuse

I don't care how you see me

Earned the right to be crazy

Like having ice cream in bed

Sleep till noon if I feel like it

Feeling gratefully lazy

So just tell me now

What's A Girl To Do?

Leslie Kaplan

2021



**TWO TRUE**

# HOLLYWOOD STORIES



By CWC-SFV Member Anne Hansell

**D**o you know that there are rattlesnakes living in the area around the Hollywood sign? The most common snake in those hills is the Western Diamondback Rattlesnake, who some wildlife experts consider the deadliest snake in our country. How do I know these facts? I grew up in the Hollywood Hills, about ten minutes away from the famous sign.

My childhood neighborhood had a unique geographic feature: a long road, snaking up through a canyon. Mid-century houses lined this road, and behind them stood thick forest. Standing there, you might feel like you're in a national park, even though these hills are located in the middle of Los Angeles.

Our neighborhood's proximity to the forest permitted wild animals—deer, raccoons, skunks, foxes, rabbits, bobcats, and coyotes—to occasionally visit our backyards.

The downside of living in the Hollywood Hills involved canines. Not the domestic dogs like residents' guard dogs, show dogs, and regular mutts, but the roaming packs of wild coyotes.

Since I was deaf since birth, my parents and sister—all with normal hearing—told me that they often woke at 2 a.m. when nearby coyote packs howled. The howling caused local dogs to bark all together, as if in a canine choir, which added to the cacophony. My family told me I was lucky that I was able to sleep soundly through the night.

One of my favorite early childhood memories was the Halloween trick-or-treat tradition in the Hollywood Hills. Every year, every day, while seated at my elementary school desk, I would glance at the classroom calendar, counting the days until October 31,

Our Hollywood Hills neighbors were very generous with Halloween treats. Many of them let children grab fistfuls of candies out of a bowl. And some adults gave us rolls of quarters, nickels, or pennies. When my friends, siblings and I finished our trick-or-treating, we returned home with our bags full of candies and coins.

On what would become a memorable Halloween eve, we kids came home from school and, as usual, excitedly changed into our costumes. For safety reasons, most parents divided the neighborhood children into different groups. Each group was shepherded by several teenagers as we walked up and down the road, visiting all the houses.

I was in the elementary school group, with my older sister and her high school friends. When we set out on our rounds, I noted the sun setting behind the forest trees.

After we had visited several houses, we were surprised to see a pack of coyotes blocking our way in the middle of road! In previous Halloweens, the coyotes had never appeared anywhere in our neighborhood. Apparently, this year they didn't want hordes of humans walking around the usually dark empty streets.

The coyotes were close enough for me to notice that they looked very skinny, their ribs showing under their fur coats. I also noticed that the coyotes' heads were as high as my chest.

My friends and I were too young to understand the danger of this situation. Instead of being scared, we were very pleased to see real live coyotes! And when the coyote pack started to move toward our group, we giggled with delight. However, our teen guardians freaked out.

The older girls grabbed our arms and dragged us away. The older boys rushed in to block the coyotes, carrying broken branches and rocks. I watched one boy wave a baseball bat as he walked slowly toward the pack.

Then we all began running toward our homes. I protested to my sister about ending our Halloween trick-or-treat so early. Despite my poor lip-reading skills, I could read her stern reply: "Too dangerous."

Back at home, my sister related to our mother what had happened with the coyote pack. Mother told me: "No more trick-or-treating tonight. Too many coyotes!"

I remember how disappointed I felt to discover that my sack was only one-fourth full. That night, after changing into my pajamas, I wandered into our living room. Our mid-century house had many large windows so the living room had three twenty-foot-tall windows overlooking the street.

I sat on a sofa and stared out the windows. I saw a dozen or more coyotes roaming all over the road under the bright streetlights. It was still Halloween night but not a child was in sight.

Although our Halloween tradition ended too early that year because of the coyotes, this incident proved to be one of my most vivid childhood memories.

As I grew up, I learned much more information about coyotes. Years later, when my husband and I took our early morning walk around Lake Hollywood, a reservoir

*(Continued on page 11)*



(Continued from page 10)

near the Hollywood sign, he suddenly realized he'd forgotten something that he needed and headed back to our car. I waited for him, alone, standing next to meadow.

While I was standing there, I suddenly sensed that I was no longer alone. I turned around and saw a coyote standing about seven feet away in the center of the meadow. I was startled because I didn't expect to see a wild coyote to come that close to me—just like the coyote pack on that long-ago Halloween. But this time I was all by myself. I recognized the inherent danger in this situation.

I'm a short woman and I noted that the coyote's head was as high as my waist! I had few options. If I ran away, I feared that the coyote might chase after me. So I stayed still, trying not to move backward away from the coyote.



I suppressed my fear and tried to stay calm. I thought that if the coyote sensed my fear, it might assume that I was prey and attack. Should it begin to move closer to me, I planned to start making noises, waving my arms to make him run away. But the coyote stared steadily at me and didn't move. I glanced at

its body—the fur looked very healthy—no ribs were showing.

Suddenly, it turned and ran back into the nearby forest. I exhaled with relief and was very glad to see that my husband was returning from his errand.

Happily, that was the last time, fifteen years ago, that I experienced a close-range encounter with a Hollywood Hills coyote.

## Heebie-Jeebies and The Willies\*

By past CWC-SFV Member Helen Pyeatt Saylor



They used to come in clanging footfalls  
Or riding the crests of amorphous gray clouds  
Building towers the better to shower down on her some  
Torrential baking, blistering, blazing particles  
Sent straight from God to chasten a sinning child  
For wrongs done or contemplated but  
Surely deserving chastisement from above.  
But when the jagged flashing sky-fire fizzled, drops  
Of cleansing cooling waters came to melt away her frenzied

Foolish Fears—

UNTIL October's ghouls and goblins, perched  
On pointy fence posts, hurled them back to churn  
Inside her, raising reedy scratchy warnings, silent yet  
To all but her as she swallowed up in terror  
Unseen ghosts in eerie blowing glue-white robes.  
They bound their choking wisps around her. Trapping in the  
Heebie-jeebies and the willies screeching now  
Within her, lacking voices save her own whimpers—  
Till Daddy's safe long arms enlaced her, drove away  
Those heebie-jeebies and the willies—

Foolish Fears!

\*This poem is reprinted from the 2001 CWC-SFV Anthology  
*Voices From The Valley*



# It Goes Without Saying

By Lillian Rodich

From *The Valley Scribe* archives: October 2011

**H**er voice, when she used it, was a high-pitched screech. Sometimes the words only mouthed when no vocal chord vibration came along with the quickly exhaled air, sometimes an eerie high-low range sliding the scale.

The audience however was attentive. Parents, sister, grandparents, family of friends and congregation members sat in Silver Spring's Temple Emanuel early Saturday morning. Sunlight filtered through the stained glass windows and flickered over the Tree of Life Sculpture housing the Torah. In this atmosphere of warmth she continued, the tallit recently presented by her grandparents draped over her shoulders like a living entity. She completed the reading of the Torah portion with her ghost of a voice. Looking up every now and then when her words faded, she maintained eye contact with the congregation.

When her Bat Mitzvah ceremony was finally finished she looked up again, took a deep breath and started her speech.

"Having been vocally impaired for almost a year," she began, "I feel that it is particularly appropriate for me to express my feelings about those whose voices have so often NOT been heard in our society. Since this is the time of year when we celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday and achievements, I am aware of the position of minorities, AIDS stricken and elderly in our society whose voices have been ignored so often. I know how it feels to have people walk away before I have finished a sentence. I know how it feels to be strangled before any words come out! I know how it feels to scream and not utter a sound. We must all listen to those less fortunate and try to help."

The short speech took her a long time to deliver. She spoke from true experience. A simple case of laryngitis months before grew worse and did not respond to treatment. Her voice became weaker and more unpredictable. She tried to adjust but was overwhelmed by fear and frustration. On the morning of her Bat Mitzvah she got through the ceremony and finally a dinner and party with much difficulty. Then her voice failed her altogether and tears filled her eyes and spilled into sobs.

One morning the following June I was awakened by a phone call. "Hi, grandma!" said a sweet familiar voice. "This is Lexi."

"Courtney," I said irritably, "Don't kid Grandma like that and pretend to be your sister. It isn't funny!"

"Grandma, this IS Alexis! Don't you know my voice?"

"Is that really, really you?" I cried.

Then I started to weep...not just tears but wrenching sobs. Was joy supposed to be so painful? A miracle had occurred—how it happened I would learn much later. The fact alone overwhelmed me with joy. Our granddaughter had lost and found her voice and in the process gained great strength and insight. After the phone call I sat quietly on the edge of my bed. My thoughts were jumbled: relief, gratitude and great pride in our Alexis...a voice for the future!

## Alexis is Twelve

the slate of a winter sky  
and dawn's green sea  
swirl in her eyes  
reflecting innocence  
intelligence  
honesty  
and a glint of curiosity  
her brow is high and smooth  
framed by the glow  
of tawny hair  
she is lean of body  
generous of spirit  
graceful animated  
living the poetry of life  
her words are her heart  
and speak  
with the voice of a woman

Lillian Rodich





## Learn more about the California Writers Club

**D**o you live to write? Write for a living? Whether you're a published author or "just always wanted to write," there's a place for you in California Writers Club! Our 21 branches range from Mendocino to Orange County and include writers of all levels and interests. Our mission: to educate writers of all abilities in the craft of writing and the marketing of their work.

### EXECUTIVE BOARD OFFICERS, BOARD

<b>President</b> Karen Gorback, Ph. D.	<b>Webmaster/ Zoom Host</b> Amat Golan-Wenick
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**T**he California Writers Club has been in existence for over 100 years, and the SFV Branch for over 20 years. Our mission is to encourage excellence in writing, fiction, non-fiction and poetry, as well as to reach out into our community and mentor writers at all stages of their writing journey. We hold meetings at the Saban Health and Wellness Center at the Motion Picture & Television Fund (MPTF), located at [23388 Mulholland Dr, Woodland Hills, CA 91364](https://www.google.com/maps/place/23388+Mulholland+Dr,+Woodland+Hills,+CA+91364), on the first Saturday of each month from 1 PM to 3 PM. Meetings are free for all members.

Our meetings feature presentations from published writers, editors and other writing industry experts speaking on topics ranging from how to improve our writing, overcome writer's block, get published, and promote our work. In addition, we host six critique groups which meet monthly or bi-monthly to give CWC-SFV members feedback from their CWC-SFV peers. They meet in person, on Zoom, or in hybrid groups.

For information and reviews on prior monthly speakers, please go to [monthly editions of the Scribe](https://www.cwc-sfv.org) at [PUBLICATIONS | San Fernando Valley Writers \(cwc-sfv.org\)](https://www.cwc-sfv.org)

If you are interested in additional information about our San Fernando Valley branch of the California Writers Club,